

COL. STORKE'S STOOL PIGEON.

A BOOM STORY.

By Franklin Austin.

"There was one man who went through the Los Angeles boom and did not know it was on," said Joe Thompson as we sat sipping our wine after dinner.

"Impossible," I exclaimed in surprise.

"It's a fact I assure you. The strange part of it is the boom made him rich and he doesn't know to this day how it happened. His name is Christopher Sykes, the most absent-minded man I ever knew—always wool-gathering. He is a philosopher in his way and a mighty good writer. His pen was always in demand.

"Mrs. Sykes is a bright nervous little woman and intensely practical in her ways. Her husband's absent-mindedness and deliberation is a constant source of exasperation to her. She is always scolding him but without effect in curing his eccentricities; yet it was easily apparent that she sincerely and devotedly loved her 'old fool' as she good naturedly called him."

"It was commonly known that Christopher Sykes had hell on the brain. That is the tendency of his philosophical turn of mind. He has been ten years writing a book on hell to my certain knowledge."

"Shortly after the boom broke out I started a literary bureau and employed a staff of writers to turn out boom pamphlets and Sykes was the best writer I had.

"Col. Cyrus Storke, a heavy real estate man, was a product of the boom. He is a tall, raw-boned, red-headed and has a fierce sandy mustache with bright piercing eyes credited with the power of hypnotizing a sucker at long range and he was the nerviest real estate man in all Los Angeles.

"One day I observed the Colonel standing on the side-walk opposite my office with his hands deep in his trouser's pockets. When Sykes came out to go to lunch he scrutinized him from head to foot then went away nodding his head in a self-satisfied way. Somehow I felt there was mischief brewing. I met Storke that afternoon and asked him what designs he had on my philosopher.

"'You are just the man I want to see,' he exclaimed, and button-holing me dragged me off to his office. 'I tell you what it is, Joe,' he began earnestly, 'if I don't look out I'm going to get into a hole. I have been loading up too heavily since this crazy boom began. I can't make my schemes go off with a rush as the other fellows do. I need a good respectable 'stool pigeon.' I must have somebody discover me. Now I'm willing to bet dollars to doughnuts that your man Sykes don't know there's a boom on.'

"You are about right there, I answered laughing. He is writing boom stuff all the time under instruction but he doesn't realize it.

"Just the man I want! Must have him at any cost!" And Storke brought his fist down on the table with a bang. "Supposing I were to be discovered by Prof. Christopher Sykes, late of Oberlin College, say through the analysis of the water from Eureka springs. To what figure would my property go up to in the present state of excitement? Where, I say?" and the Colonel's eyes snapped fire at the thought.

"But he is not a professor, I exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, held the chair of Ancient History at Oberlin until a year and half ago when he came to California for his wife's health.

"By Jove I've known him a good while and wasn't aware of it.

"Well don't let on I want him to remain just where he is out of sight.

"But I can't let you use this man Cyrus unless you play square with him," I expostulated.

"I will make him rich in no time—rich; do you hear, rich! I will give you my word of honor, Joe. There's my hand on it.

"Col. Storke was excited and no mistake. But every body knew that when Storke passed his word of honor to play square no considerations on earth could tempt him to break the promise. Therefore, I felt satisfied to let the game go on. He then discussed his plans until I felt like a fellow conspirator against innocence.

"I must test him first as an inside 'graft pigeon' added Storke thoughtfully, 'to see how easily I can handle him.'

"Two mornings after this, if my memory serves me right, Sykes drew twenty dollars before going to work, remarking, 'guess I had better get the money to pay the grocer before I forget it or I will get into trouble with wife.'

"How it happened that the Colonel began his operations that same day I cannot say. Sykes had just got up to his ears in his subject when Col. Storke appeared at his desk. No one ever thought of getting a word out of Sykes when he was writing and as usual he took no notice of the intrusion. Nothing daunted, Col. Storke, brought his brawny hand down on the shoulder of the scribe and when he looked up transfixed him with his glittering eyes.

"'Lend me twenty dollars,' he said in commanding tones.

"Sykes mechanically handed him the twenty dollar piece he had drawn for the grocer.

"'Put this deed in your pocket as security,' again commanded Storke and Sykes obeyed without even looking at the document. When the Colonel had gone he was again absorbed with his work as if nothing had happened.

"A few minutes before noon Col. Storke reappeared and leaving five twenty-dollar pieces on Sykes' desk, said: 'Give me that deed,' and unfolding another document commanded: 'sign there! indicating the place with his finger.

"Sykes obediently complied and mechanically pocketing the money went on with his work. When he went home to lunch Mrs. Sykes said:

"'I'll wager anything you forgot the money for the grocer.

"'No, I didn't,' answered Sykes gleefully. 'Drew twenty this morning before I had a chance to forget it. And pulling the five twenties out of his pocket stood dumfounded gazing at them.

"'How did you get so much money?' demanded his wife.

"'I don't know.'

"'Don't know! twenty dollar pieces don't grow on bushes do they?'

"Sykes had a habit of jotting down in his note book 'cases in point' in literature to jog his memory. 'Ah! let me see. Let me see,' he said, 'if anything extraordinary happened I must have noted a case in point. Yes. Yes. Here it is,' and he read from his note book: '9:15 a. m. Case in point:—He who steals my purse steals trash.' Sykes looked puzzled.

"'O brother Shakespere. I suppose you let somebody steal your first twenty, but how did you get these back, Chris.'

"'Oh, here's another memoranda,' he said, brightening: '11:45 a. m.—case in point—Cast thy bread upon the waters and after many days it returneth many fold.'

"'Fiddlesticks! Gambling. That's what you have been doing.

"'Nonsense! Now, Now, darling, in your calmer moments, bless me! you would know that was impossible. I a gambler!—in your calmer moments dear, you would recollect that I don't know how.'

"'What do these memoranda in your note-book mean then—symbols of speech you call them—figures of speech no doubt to hide your secrets from me,' she said jealously.

"'It means, it means, my dear, that somebody took the twenty dollars and afterwards brought back this money.'

"'And you don't remember who took the twenty and who brought the hundred. You need a guardian, you do. It's lucky you've got a sensible wife. Well, I'll keep the money since you call it trash.'

As she gazed at the brilliant twenties in her hand Mrs. Sykes grew calmer. She had always secretly regretted her husband's utter incapacity for business. She guessed that some real estate broker had strolled into his office and induced him to speculate and he had been too pre-occupied with his work to remember it. She remembered that her lady friends were always telling her about making a lot of money in a single day. Therefore, Mrs. Sykes gave him back two of the twenty dollar pieces in the hope that they might use him again in speculation. But her wildest imagination could not paint the lot that was in store for them.

In the meantime it was rumored on the street that Col. Storke had interested a rich and distinguished man from the East in his enterprise, but who, for the present refused to let his name be known. Even the newspapers commented on the 'fine Italian hand' that was being felt in financial circles. The next day the papers announced that the mysterious person in question had obtained the choice of lots in the Wolfskill subdivision which was about to be put on the market. But all commended the energy and fair dealing of Col. Storke who advertised that all who desired lots could obtain them in the order of their subscription regardless of preference excepting such lots as had already been secured by Prof. Sykes.

The excitement can hardly be wondered at. Before the afternoon of the day the sale took place the receipts designating positions on the map sold for from \$1000 to \$5000 premium. It was then Col. Storke unloaded the choice lots held by the mysterious gentleman from the East.

"But I am getting ahead of my story," said Thompson. The day before the Wolfskill sale, Storke said to me 'now introduce me Joe.' I went in and reminded Sykes that it was noon and when he came out introduced them. The Colonel invited him to lunch.

"Oh, this is a proud moment for me," exclaimed the Colonel as they took seats at table. "One like myself feels honored to be in the presence of a man of such learning. Your description of the Eureka Land & Water Co. was simply beautiful.

"Oh, bless my soul! You should not judge my work by such hack work," answered Sykes, 'I must read you a chapter in my philosophical work, 'Is Hell a Myth.'

"It would be a great source of happiness to me. I am such a lover of philosophy. By the way, sir, (pardon me for changing the subject), but I called on you the other day when you seemed quite pre-occupied with your work. I thought, because of my great admiration for you, that I would give you a tip concerning some lots that were doubling in value five or six times a day. You gave me twenty dollars for an option and I am happy to say I was enabled to increase it to a hundred dollars for you."

"Are you the friend who did me that good turn? Bless my soul! Bless me! Let me shake you by the hand, sir. My wife has purchased a new dress which she calls her 'Boom' gown.

"Col. Storke felt apprehensive. Had this man at last learned of the 'Boom'? But his fears were short-lived.

"I remember at the time of wondering," continued Sykes, 'what sense there could be in her application of the word boom to her new gown. I could not suppose that she referred to a gib-boom or to the boom of cannon. But I have observed that women when married to philosophers, possess more or less developed, many of the attributes which gave Zantippe rather unenviable fame.